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SUBJECT: KENYA GIRL GUIDES ASSOCIATION: CIVIL SOCIETY
AT ITS BEST

¶1. (U) Summary: The Kenya Girl Guides Association (KGG) unveiled its new emphasis on educating girls and young women on health issues, especially reproductive health, at a six hour ceremony featuring addresses by First Lady Lucy Kibaki, Minister of Youth Dr. Mohammed Kutu, and MP Njoki Ndungu, champion of Kenya's Sexual Offenses Act. KGG is a fine example of a non-partisan Kenyan civil society organization pursuing ambitious social and political goals through a long term strategy and vision. End Summary.

¶2. (U) PolCouns attended the re-launching ceremony of the Kenya Girl Guides Association at the invitation of the State Minister for Youth, with whom the mission is working closely on CJTF-HOA civil affairs projects in his northern Kenya constituency. The six hour event showcased the work of the Girl Guides to promote vital social and health messages throughout the country.

¶3. (U) KGG is implementing a rigorous PEPFAR-funded age-appropriate peer education program where girls can earn up to 4 merit badges in AIDS prevention. To provide HIV/AIDS education and information to students and the community, KGG conducts peer education activities working with educational institutions, NGOs, religious bodies, the private sector and local administrators. The peer educators disseminate information to students and community members, targeting over 100 schools and reaching more than 20,000 young people.

Who Are the Girl Guides?

¶4. (U) The Kenya equivalent of the Girl Scouts of America, KGG is the oldest and largest youth organization in Kenya with over 130,000 members. KGG includes Brownies, Girl Guides, Rangers and Ranger Cadets, all between the ages of 6 and 25 years, who are organized by Guide Leaders. The Kenya Girl Guides have a long history in Kenya offering informal education through chapters run out of schools throughout the country. Typically, teachers appoint students considered potential peer leaders to join the guides. Many prominent Kenyan women in politics, the civil service and the professions were once guides. The leadership of the organization are

chosen through elections and serve on a voluntary basis. KGG is associated with the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, which are active in over a hundred countries.

What are their goals?

¶5. (U) The stated mission of KGG is "to enable girls and young women to develop to their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the world." KGG seeks to empower "girls and young women so they can take responsibility for all matters affecting their lives and live and work with men on an equal basis." It operates a program of value-based education to primary and secondary school-aged girls. KGG seeks to give girls and young women "the ability to make their own choices with regard to traditional beliefs and cultural practices...the skills and the opportunities to organize and use their collective power to advocate for justice, fairness and equality on behalf of themselves and others...to generate income, own and control assets, access and use credit...to influence decision-makers, including men, through their advocacy of fairer, appropriate allocation of resources and to change policies to those that favor equality of women and all disadvantaged persons."

¶6. (U) KGG's re-launching ceremony was held to unveil the worldwide Girl Guides movement's new emphasis on adolescent health issues, especially reproductive health. Its seven major themes are fighting HIV/AIDS, making healthy food choices, preventing adolescent pregnancy, the importance of talking about sex, talking about the

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dangers of drugs, banning smoking in public places and creating opportunities to discover one's full potential.

Re-Launching Ceremony Highlights

¶7. (U) The ceremony featured groups and individual guides from throughout Kenya presenting skits, poems and songs on social and health themes. In many cases these presentations were extremely frank and explicit, and quite moving. Issues treated in these presentations included rape and other acts of violence against women, child molestation, gender inequality, poverty, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and prostitution. The top performances were broadcast on Kenyan television. These dramatic presentations showcased the effectiveness of Girl Guides in educating their peers about these issues and the dangers they pose.

¶8. (SBU) The ceremony opened and closed with Christian prayers, without a nod to Kenya's other faiths, although KGG chapters from Muslim-majority areas were participants in the ceremony, as was the Minister of Youth, himself a Muslim. A prominent KGG board member from Kenya's Hindu community was also present. Comment: KGG has its roots in Church-led schooling. It apparently has not expanded its notion of the spiritual to embrace its non-Christian members. End Comment.

¶9. (SBU) The address by the chief guest and newly appointed KGG patron, Her Excellency Lucy Kibaki, First Lady of Kenya, introduced a sour note into the proceedings. Kibaki began her remarks by castigating KGG for waiting four years to appoint her as patron. "In every country in the world the First Lady is always made the patron of the Girl Guides. I am a former Girl Guide myself. What excuse do you have for not naming me patron in 2002 when we came to power?" Comment: Highly unpopular Lucy Kibaki has a well-known reputation for ungracious behavior. State House generally keeps her out of the public eye to avoid political damage to the President. Apparently, the thinking was "What harm can she possibly do at a Girl Guides ceremony?" Her State

House handlers underestimated Lucy Kibaki's talent for causing offense. End Comment.

¶10. (U) The address by the State Minister for Youth Affairs, Honorable Doctor Mohammed Kuti, MP for Isiolo South, featured his vision of adapting the traditions found in several Kenyan communities of age groups sharing adulthood initiation rites into a national youth service organization that would bring together Kenyan youth from throughout the country for shared civic education and civic action projects, thus building cross-communal generational identity around shared civic values. Kuti stressed the importance of preserving the best of traditional values while letting go of harmful traditional practices and ethnic prejudices. He also made the point that he as a Muslim medical doctor had thoroughly investigated and rejected claims that female genital mutilation is a required Islamic practice. "I concluded that it is in fact Haram (forbidden), and I am not at all alone in that determination."

¶11. (U) The Honorable Lady Justice Joyce Alouch and nominated MP Honorable Njoki Ndungu both gave talks about the importance of educating girls and women about the provisions of the recently passed Sexual Offenses Act. They offered to speak to KGG chapters throughout Kenya to get the word out. They praised KGG as the most effective means of peer education among girls and young women in Kenya.

Comments: A Kenyan Civil Society Organization on the March

¶12. (U) KGG is a fine example of a non-partisan Kenyan

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civil society organization pursuing ambitious social and political goals through a long term strategy and vision. The conventional wisdom in Kenya holds that civil society organizations today are far tamer and less effective than they were during the height of campaigning for multiparty democracy in the 1990s. Yet the times and the issues have changed greatly since that confrontational period. Kenya's present transitional political phase is a confused mess in many respects, with reformers and old-style hacks found on both sides of the political divide and minimal legislative progress being made to address the key issues facing the nation. Fortunately for Kenya, as American history amply illustrates, positive social and political change need not come from the political class alone. Long Live the Kenya Girl Guides Association!
RANNEBERGER